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St. Thomas Church
4.26.20; Easter 3A
Lk 24:13-35

The Hidden Jesus

I admit I have a horrible time with my directions and always seem to be getting lost. There was a time as a boy scout that I was hiking with my troop in the remote woods of the Olympics. I foolishly decided to take a solo hike after dinner. It got dark quickly and soon I found myself completely lost without a hiking partner or a flashlight. I could not find my way back to camp until the scout master sent the rescue squad. I have never been happier to be rescued. There are many more serious examples in my life when I have found myself traveling in the wrong direction. Perhaps you have had these kinds of experiences too?

If so, then this story from the Gospel of Luke is for you. I have always had a soft spot for the two travelers in today's Easter story who thought they were going in the right direction but in the end discovered that they needed a roundtrip ticket back to Jerusalem. We know that they are Jesus' disciples but not part of the original twelve. It is a bit of a mystery about who these two truly are and yet God has cast them in major roles.

One is Cleopas and the other is unnamed and possibly a woman. It is easy for me, especially in those ancient times, to imagine a husband and wife inviting Jesus into their home and offering him dinner. There is no doubt they were deep, spiritual companions who weren't afraid to reveal their vulnerability and ultimately their joy and courage in the face of adversity. I don't blame this mysterious couple one bit for wanting to return to Emmaus, their likely home, a safer place to bury their hopes than on the streets of a chaotic Jerusalem.

We all know what it feels like to attempt to flee from danger. When we have been kicked so hard by the losses and tragedies of our lives that we can hardly breathe because the pain has knocked the wind out of us: the death of a dream, a career, a lifestyle, a marriage, a good friend, our health. Can't you hear the sorrow in their voices, "We were hoping...we were hoping...that he would be the one to redeem and liberate Israel." The irony is that Jesus, hope incarnate, is walking right alongside with them the entire trip to Emmaus and they don't even know it

until the very end. But, even in this place of great sadness, a road with mile markers made of tears, they still have been able to hang onto love.

In our Church's wedding liturgy, there is a beautiful prayer for a newly married couple that points to the sacramental nature of keeping intimate company, "Give this couple wisdom and devotion in the ordering of their common life, that each may be to the other a strength in need, a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy." This wisdom, strength, comfort, and joy is what God promised to his original disciples and to us—to send us two by two—into all of the mission fields of our lives be it two doctors working side by side for the care of a patient, a sister helping her distressed brother with math, or two friends who bear their souls over a glass of wine.

God desires to provide us with companionship regardless of our age, gender, or marital status. God has created us for relationship—that is clear from the moment God began creation as recorded in the Book of Genesis when he noted that that human beings are vulnerable to loneliness. This fact is one of the major reasons our present quarantine has hit us so hard as it challenges us to rethink what it means to be healthy and human in the midst of being physically distanced with limited access to each other. But as the beloved couple in today's story soon discovered they really were never alone. They only thought they were. Even though Jesus had died on the Cross, he had not abandoned them. He had come back, and he was with them, though he was traveling incognito. He was the hidden Jesus.

Ok I am going to come right out with it. Sometimes I think Jesus is downright sneaky. On Easter Day, the feast of the resurrection, we have come to expect the loud, joyful music and ringing of bells but often God arrives in much subtler ways. Often Jesus slips into our lives when we are distracted and not looking for him and then so captures our hearts that they burn with an excitement and electricity that reminds us of our first love. I love the hidden Jesus and cherish him.

This Easter season, more than any other in my memory, reveals that Jesus is often in hiding and we need to keep our eyes open to see him. Jesus hidden in a humble manger in a backwater town called Bethlehem. Jesus hidden in the heart of a grieving religious leader whose daughter was dying. Jesus, hidden in the cup of water offered by a woman from Samaria who was full of shame. Jesus hidden in

his many parables about love. Jesus hidden in the disguise of a criminal hanging on a cross. The hidden Jesus resurrected in a dark tomb when nobody was looking so as to avoid a spectacle and then one by one, two by two, eleven by eleven he enters human hearts and captures them with his Love. Yes, Jesus has a way of sneaking up on you and reveals himself when you least suspect it. He often slips into our lives and knows when we have left a back door unlocked. In fact, what makes you so certain that he isn't sneaking up on you and me right now!

You know, we too are all at risk for being infected with this love. It's one of the few infections that we don't want immunity from. Think about it. We are doing exactly what Cleopas and his intimate companion did. We are struggling to hold onto hope in the face of profound loss and grief. We are struggling to discern whether we will get our old lives back, or better yet, be able to live into a new life full of hope—just like this grieving couple did. In our distress we have sought intimate conversation with him or will have. Jesus is on our minds and in our prayers. We are listening intently to his Scriptures as they are broken open for us, and soon we will be breaking bread together virtually and experiencing spiritual communion and digital companionship with one another.

Companionship is such a beautiful word. It comes from the Latin word for bread which is "pan". Companionship literally means breaking bread together or sharing a meal with someone. Jesus promises to feed us with spiritual food. He is always present (though often hidden) in the ordinary and the extra-ordinary meals of our lives. How might we put spiritual companionship into practice? I invite you to continue the tradition some of us began on Maundy Thursday—of beginning the preparation with ritual washing and cleansing, followed by enjoying a simple meal with companions while discussing favorite scripture, and then ending with praying and giving thanks and offering each other a blessing.

If you are living alone, don't think this doesn't apply to you. If Jesus could walk through the locked doors of the Upper Room where the disciples were hiding, He most certainly can reach you and dine with you. He is our most trustworthy and loyal companion, friend and host. And he always picks up the bill! During these trying times, I invite us to take time to celebrate all of the faithful Easter companions in our lives—our partners, spouses, children, friends, and St. Thomas

family and receive inspiration from Jesus who offered companionship not only for two lonely and lost travelers on a dusty road a long time ago but to us as well.

Today we remember that spiritual companionship in all of its forms, is what God promises us and he will continue to open our eyes and surprise us with it. Jesus is coming through the back door and is eager to reveal his love and companionship even when it is hidden or disguised. And always remember Jesus is never spiritually quarantined and neither are we. Amen.